

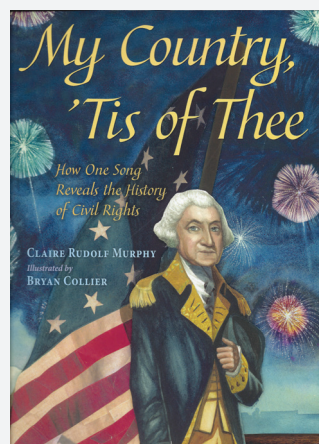
Second Reaction: Patriotism through Words and Song

Mora, Pat, and Libby Martinez. *I Pledge Allegiance*.

Illus. Patrice Barton. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014. Print.

Murphy, Claire. *My Country, 'Tis of Thee: How One Song Reveals the History of Civil Rights*. Illus. Bryan Collier. New York: Henry Holt and company, 2014. Print.

Claire Covington



I Pledge Allegiance tells a heartwarming family story about immigration. Young Libby's great aunt, whom she calls Lobo (meaning "wolf" in Spanish), has passed her citizenship test! At the end of the week, Lobo will go through a special ceremony in which she must say the Pledge of Allegiance. Libby's teacher uses the occasion to have the class practice the Pledge of Allegiance and asks Libby to prepare to recite it for the class. Within the larger story of immigration, Murphy includes tidbits about the Pledge of Allegiance itself. The teacher tells the class that the Pledge of Allegiance was written in 1892 and helps to define the word "indivisible"—the only informational tidbit that appears in the story itself. While the story is patriotic, full of honor for family and country, I think Murphy misses an opportunity to give readers more of the historical background on the Pledge of Allegiance. This information appears in the author's note. Despite this weakness, this is an excellent book to use for lessons on citizenship and immigration. The beautiful, digitally colored pencil sketches are expressive and full of love. The light sprinkling of Spanish words emphasizes the family's country of origin (Mexico) and brings a new perspective to the process of becoming an American citizen. The mother/daughter duo who wrote

the book are dedicated to increasing awareness of Latino/a and multicultural resources, and Pat Mora founded Dia/Children's Book Day, a celebration of children and bookjoy.

As a public librarian, I look for books that make interesting read-a-louds that also convey information well. With that in mind, I read these two books in a story time for school-aged children. A group of 15 young people attended, ranging from ages 7 to 10. We began by discussing the Pledge of Allegiance. The children were all familiar with the Pledge of Allegiance and knew all of the words from school. They knew that the Pledge of Allegiance was for the flag and our country, but they could not verbalize a deeper understanding of why we say the it or what it means to Americans. Two of the boys were brothers whose grandfather is from Mexico. Having been raised in the US, they have not seen the citizenship process, but are used to hearing Spanish spoken in their home. The older brother, who is 9, eagerly engaged with the text, and his younger brother (age 7) caught his enthusiasm. The one 10-year-old attendee, a girl, and a bit beyond the recommended 3 to 8 age range, listened patiently but took little interest in the story. It did inspire her to tell us about her recent visit to a local museum where she got to actually watch a naturalization ceremony, though!

The second book that we read was *My Country, 'Tis of Thee*. Again, the children were familiar with the song from school, but did not know much about it. They were very surprised to find out that the song originated in England, not America. Each page tells about a new verse written to support civil rights, suffrage, and labor movements. The listeners got a little restless during this 41-page read aloud. The author offers a solution for this problem. Each page has two types of text. A dense paragraph full of facts appears on one page, but the facing page contains a simple line or two describing the idea being presented and the verse from the song. When attentions started to wander, I simply read the shorter lines. The watercolor and collage illustrations are lovely, and each time I read the book I saw something new. This book sparked some interesting discussions, such as why African American children could only listen from the back of the church in 1831 (21) or why women and Native Americans could not vote (33). *My Country, 'Tis of Thee* engaged a wider age range within the group, and the children loved the challenge at the end to write a verse themselves. This book would make a wonderful addition to a classroom collection. Challenging vocabulary and detailed back matter, including voluminous source notes, sheet music, and a bibliography, make this an excellent historical and multicultural resource.

Works Cited

- Mora, Pat, and Libby Martinez. *I Pledge Allegiance*. Illus. Patrice Barton. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014. Print.
- Murphy, Claire Rudolf. *My Country, 'Tis of Thee*. Illus. Bryan Collier. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2014. Print.

About the Author

Claire Covington is the assistant director of the Waynesboro Public Library in Waynesboro, Virginia. She received her B.A. from Mary Washington College and her MLIS from the University of South Carolina. Claire is a frequent volunteer for local theater companies and an enthusiastic supporter of the arts. She currently resides in Fishersville, Virginia with her family, two cats, and their dog Bobo. She can be contacted at hensleyv@email.sc.edu.